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Chapter 9

Metacognitive Reading Strategies and the Text Type

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Abstract
This study purported to see the effect of text type on metacognitive reading strategy use. To this end, the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) test was used to assess the use of metacognitive strategies and examine the effect of text type (expository and narrative) on these strategies. It also sought to determine to what degree gender, proficiency and motivation could affect the use of this strategy. Results showed that text type is effective in the learners’ choice of the strategies. Students reading expository text significantly used more metacognitive reading strategies than those reading narrative texts. It was also seen that more proficient students used the strategies more than less proficient ones. Moreover, there was a linear relationship between motivation and metacognitive reading strategies. However, gender had no significant effect on the use of metacognitive strategies.

Introduction
Many students enter higher education without having the essential ability of reading in English as a second or foreign language. When they are pressed to read, as Wade, Trathen and Schraw (1990, p.150) and Wood, Motz and Willoughby (1998, p.701) state, they often select ineffective and insufficient strategies with little strategic intent. Dreyer (1998, p.20) believes that this is often due to their low level of reading strategy knowledge and lack of metacognitive control. Another reason perhaps, according to Dreyer and Nel (2003, p.350), is their inexperience originating from the limited task demands of high school and the fact that 50% of the focus is still on knowledge reproduction.

Researchers consistently posit that metacognition plays an important role in reading. Metacognition has been defined as “having knowledge (cognition) and having understanding, control over, and appropriate use of that knowledge” (Tei & Stewart, 1985, p.48). Thus, it involves both conscious awareness and conscious control of one’s learning.

A large body of research has investigated the relationship between learning strategies, especially metacognitive and cognitive strategies and foreign or second language environment (Oh, 1992), L2 proficiency and gender (Oxford & Green, 1995; Shokouhi & Parvaresh, 2010), language proficiency (Bremner, 1999; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Shokouhi & Askari, 2010) in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and communication strategies and gender (Shokouhi & Angameh, 2008; Shokouhi, Daram & Saba, 2011). However, fewer studies have focused on the effect of text genre on the use of metacognitive strategies. Given the encouraging results of previous research, the aim of present study is mainly to shed light on the effects of text type on the use of metacognitive reading strategies of senior students of English as a foreign language.

Review of Literature
Recently, there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of metacognitive awareness of
one’s cognitive and motivational processes while reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Researchers working in this area believe that awareness and monitoring one’s comprehension processes are critically important aspects of skilled reading. Such awareness and monitoring processes are often referred to in the literature as *metacognition* or as Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, p.249) lay down, “the knowledge of readers’ cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when monitoring and regulating text comprehension”. As part of metacognitive strategies, they often refer to learning and reading strategies.

**Learning strategies vs. reading strategies**

In the context of second language learning, as Singhal (2001, p.1) holds, a distinction can be made between learning strategies and reading strategies. Learning strategies can make learning more effective while reading strategies improve comprehension. Comprehension or reading strategies indicate how readers conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand. Singhal promotes such strategies (reading strategies) to processes used by the learner in enhancing reading comprehension and overcoming comprehension failures.

Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, p. 252) define only three sub-categories or subscales for metacognitive reading strategies on the basis of which they invented a questionnaire. They include *Global Reading Strategies, Problem Solving Strategies* and *Support Reading Strategies*. *Global Reading Strategies* are a set of strategies oriented towards a global analysis of text; i.e. they can be thought of as generalized, intentional reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act (e.g., setting purpose for reading and making predictions). The second type or *Problem-Solving Strategies* provide readers with action plans that ‘allow them to navigate through the text skillfully’. Such strategies are localized, focused problem-solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information (e.g. checking one’s understanding on encountering conflicting information or rereading for better understanding). The last one called *Support Reading Strategies* involve the use of outside reference materials, taking notes, and other practical strategies that might be described as functional or support strategies.

**Variables affecting strategy use**

The vast literature on language learning strategies (LLSs) points to a number of factors believed to affect learners’ use of LLSs. Among these, learners’ level of proficiency, L2 or FL environments, career interest, gender, type of institution, career interest, motivation and nationality have been proven to have a strong effect on learners’ use of different types of strategies.

In fact, the significant role of metacognition and comprehension monitoring in the current descriptions of the reading processes, as reflected by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, p.250), can be observed in the growth of interest in reading comprehension monitoring research. Teachers and researchers value this crucial aspect of reading which shows the link between comprehension monitoring and academic learning. Paris and Winograd (cited in Mokhtari & Reichard (2002)) maintain that metacognition can promote academic learning and motivation. In fact, students can enhance their learning by becoming aware of their thinking and solve problems as they read and write. Because of the value placed by researchers and teachers on metacognitive reading strategies, this study plans to focus on the use of this strategy in reading and explore its relationship with different text types.

Text types are known to have an influence on readers’ performance as shown in several studies (Carrell, 1984, 1989). Many terms are used to describe text types but narrative and
expository are used most commonly (Kent, 1984, p.233). The reason for using these two types of texts in this study is that in early grades, narrative text is the most common type on which instruction occurs (Lapp, Flood, & Farnan, 1989, p.373). However, as children progress through primary grades, they increasingly encounter expository text. In higher grades, most students are expected to read expository material to derive content information. Moreover, by high school, students spend the majority of their instructional time reading expository texts (Barton, 1997; Hudson, Lignugaris-Kraft, & Miller, 1993). Empirical evidence indicates that for most students, expository reading poses a greater challenge than does narrative reading (Berkowitz & Taylor, 1981; Berman & Katzenberger, 2004; Taylor & Beach, 1984; Weaver & Kintch, 1991).

**Methodology**

**Participants**

The participants of the study comprised 60, 30 males and 30 female EFL learners who were studying English Language and Translation at the university at the time they were being tested. All participants were native speakers of Persian and ranged from 20-25 years in age. The participants were divided into two groups having nearly the same level of language proficiency which was evaluated based on a test of English as a Foreign Language. Since this study mainly focuses on metacognitive strategies which are usually less commonly used by beginners or pre-intermediate students, senior students of English are chosen for this purpose. Furthermore, the MARSI used in this study is designed, as Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, p.251) assert, to assess adolescent and adult readers’ metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials. The students were divided into two groups based on their scores obtained from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). All those who had obtained percentages below 55% were categorized as “at risk” while those with percentages above 55% were categorized as “successful”. These scales (percentages) which are adopted in the present study were based on Dreyer and Nel (2003).

**Instruments**

Overall, four instruments were utilized for data collection purposes in the study. These included a proficiency test, two types of reading texts, narrative and expository, the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory or MARSI and a motivation questionnaire.

**Data collection**

The data were collected in three consecutive weeks during the spring semester of 2008 academic year. All the data collection was carried out by the researchers with the cooperation of the teacher. As stated above, two groups of senior students participated in this study. A Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was given to both groups to assess the proficiency level of the students. Then the participants in each group were divided into two groups of successful and unsuccessful or “at risk” students based on their scores obtained from the test.

After the proficiency test, the motivation questionnaire was given to the students. Then, one group received 2 expository texts and the other group 2 narrative texts. As mentioned earlier, two of these passages were taken from books common to non-academic bookstores and the other two passages were the altered versions of these originals. The two altered versions were intended for comparison of the genres with the same content, but different nonfiction writing style (organization of information), such that any differences in the use of
metacognitive strategies while reading the reading texts could be attributed to a particular nonfiction genre. Each of these four texts is followed by ten questions to which students should respond for further assessment of their reading comprehension. When the students answered the questions and the task of reading comprehension was accomplished, they were given the MARS.

Data analysis
First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the data to determine whether the participants were low, medium, or high strategy users with respect to the whole MARS. In examining the reading strategy usage of individual and groups of students on the MARS, which ranges from 1 to 5, three levels of usage can be identified, as suggested by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995, p.2) for general language learning strategy usage: high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5 to 3.4), and low (2.4 or lower). Then, the obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures as well as t-test to examine whether significant differences exist between the two groups of subjects regarding their reported strategy awareness and use while reading.

Results
Pattern of the overall metacognitive strategy use by the two groups
Quantitative approach to the data analysis showed the type of the text which is effective on the use of metacognitive strategies while reading. Table 1 below summarizes the descriptive analysis of the mean strategy use by the participants which was found to be 3.46 (SD= 0.77) for the group we called ‘expository group’ and 3.01 (SD= 0.71) for the group we named ‘narrative group’.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the metacognitive strategy use by expository and narrative groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.4653</td>
<td>.77879</td>
<td>.14219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrative</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.0180</td>
<td>.71909</td>
<td>.13129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995, p.2) three levels of usage can be identified for general language learning strategy use: high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5 to 3.4), and low (2.4 or lower). So according to the mean scores of the overall metacognitive strategy use of the two groups (3.46 in the expository group and 3.01 in the narrative group), the participants of this study were moderate users of metacognitive reading strategy.

The results of the study with respect to the overall mean of strategy use are consistent with the results obtained in other EFL contexts. For instance, Noguchi (1991) in Japan, Yang (1994) in Taiwan, Oh (1992) and Park (1997) in Korea, and Wharton (2000) in Singapore all found that the EFL learners used strategies at a medium level.

As indicated earlier, the main focus of this study was on the effect of text type on the use of metacognitive reading strategies. Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between the expository and narrative group in using metacognitive reading strategies. The results obtained in this study is consistent with other studies (Carrell, 1984) indicating that text types have an influence on readers’ performance.
Table 2. T-test results of the metacognitive strategy use by expository and narrative group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's test for equality of variances</th>
<th>T-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.909</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Pattern of global strategy use by the two groups
As it is evident from Table 3 below, a significant difference is observed between the expository and narrative group in using global strategies. This means that expository group made more use of global strategies than the narrative group.

Table 3. T-test result of the global strategy use by the two groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's test for equality of variances</th>
<th>T-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Pattern of support strategy use by the two groups
Table 4 below demonstrates the significant difference in the use of support reading strategy between the two groups. In this study, expository group used support reading strategies more than the narrative group.

Table 4. T-test result of the support strategy use by the two groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's test for equality of variances</th>
<th>T-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Pattern of problem-solving strategy use by the two groups
As noted in Table 5 below, a significant difference is observed between the expository and narrative groups in using global strategies.
Table 5. T-test results of the problem-solving strategy use by the two groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's test for equality of variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.144</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>2.250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Table 5 depicts that the expository group’s use of problem-solving strategies is more than the narrative group.

Figure 1. Summary of the mean scores of the overall strategy use and the three strategy categories of the two groups (1=global strategy use, 2=support strategy use, 3=problem-solving strategy use, 4= total metacognitive strategy use)

The effect of gender on the use of the overall MARS I

Using a quantitative approach to gender differences in each group as Tables 6 and 7 demonstrate, we found no gender differences in any of the two groups.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the gender differences in the expository group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Table 7. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the gender differences in the narrative group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

The effect of proficiency on the use of the overall MARS I

Tables 8 and 9 represent the mean score and SD of metacognitive reading strategy use by different proficiency levels.
Table 8. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the proficiency level in the expository group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More proficient</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less proficient</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Table 9. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the proficiency level in the narrative group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More proficient</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less proficient</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

The effect of motivation on the use of the overall MARSI

As mentioned previously, motivation is considered as one of the variables influencing the language learning and reading strategy use. In order to see if students’ motivation can affect the use of whole metacognitive reading strategies in this study, a T-test was run. The results showed that the difference between the two motivational levels in using the overall strategies was significant (p<0.05), as shown in Tables 10 and 11 below respectively.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the motivation in the expository group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high-motivated</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low-motivated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Table 11. Descriptive statistics and t-test results of the motivation in the narrative group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high-motivated</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.752</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low-motivated</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.607</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

The findings of the present research show that the more motivated the learners, the more they reported to strategy use. These findings support the findings of the previous studies (e.g., Change & Huang, 1999; MacIntyre & Noels; 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Wharton, 2000, among others).

Discussion

Researchers consistently posit that metacognition plays an important role in reading. Metacognition has been defined as “having knowledge (cognition) and having understanding, control over, and appropriate use of that knowledge” (Tei & Stewart, 1985, p.48). Thus, it involves both conscious awareness and conscious control of one’s learning. In a summary of research on metacognitive from the Center for the study of Reading at the University of Illinoise, Armbruster (1983) cited in Collins (1994, p.95) presents "reading to learn from a metacognitive perspective" as it relates to four variables: texts, tasks, strategies, and learner characteristics.

This research mainly focuses on the effect of text type on the use of metacognitive reading strategies. Then the effect of gender, proficiency and motivation as learner characteristics on metacognitive strategy use with reference to the results obtained in section
four will be discussed. In so doing, the results are discussed in the order in which the research questions were presented above.

The effect of text type, gender, proficiency and motivation on the use of metacognitive reading strategies

Among the variables studied, text type was found to have the most influential role in the use of metacognitive reading strategies. According to the results obtained in this study, students reading expository texts used metacognitive reading strategies more than those reading narrative texts (Table 2). The reason for the higher use of metacognitive reading strategies by the expository group may be connected to the difficulty concerning expository texts. Although many factors may contribute to the difficulty students experience with expository reading, Laura and Lynn (2002, p.2) mention that the most commonly cited are text structure, conceptual density and familiarity, vocabulary knowledge and prior knowledge. Text structure refers to how the ideas in text are organized to convey a message to the reader (Weaver & Kintsch, 1991, p.235). Unlike narrative texts which utilize some variant of the basic story grammar that routinely includes a setting, a series of episodes, a problem and a solution (Meyer & Rice, 1984, p.327), expository texts frequently employ more varied and complicated text structures (Taylor, 1982, p.331). In sum, expository reading is difficult because its structure is variable within and across texts.

Greater conceptual density and less familiarity is another factor contributing the difficulty of expository texts, as believed by Taylor and Samuels (1983, p.520) who believe that, as compared with narrative texts which are composed of highly familiar ideas and language (Graesser, Golding & Long, 1991, p.179), expository texts are rampant with ideas unknown to readers and scattered with vocabulary items that are somewhat uncommon. Vocabulary knowledge can attribute to students’ difficulty with expository reading and expository texts consist of highly technical, multisyllabic words which students often have difficulty decoding (Armbruster & Nagy, 1992, p.552; Bryant, Ugel, Thompson & Hamff, 1999, p.295).

Students’ difficulty with expository reading can also be associated with students’ schema or prior knowledge, an element presumed to provide the foundation for understanding (Meyer & Rice, 1984, p.325). Generally, students have minimal knowledge of the manner in which expository texts are structured and the concepts addressed in expository texts (Englert & Hiebert, 1984, p.70; Taylor & Samuels, 1983, p.522). On the other hand, students generally find narrative reading easier than expository reading because they possess a great deal of prior knowledge related to the structure and concepts that are characteristics of narrative text (Graesser et al., 1991, p.182).

In this study, it was shown that not only expository texts affect the use of metacognitive reading strategies more than narrative text (Table 2) but also they are effective in the use of the three subcategories of global, support and problem-solving strategies.

Global strategies as previously mentioned, are defined as generalized intentional reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act. Strategies such as skimming the text first by understanding characteristics like length and organization, previewing the text to see what it is about before reading it are examples of global strategies. In fact, text openings appear to be good indicators of overall text construction because they serve to establish the initial context within which a text unfolds. They also serve as important starting points and hence guidelines for readers, because they set up expectations about what text type they are confronting and what it is about (Hoey, 2002 cited in Berman & Katzenberger, 2004, p.58). Berman and Katzenberger (2004) believe that genre plays a critical role in shaping text
openings. For instance, in narrative research, the opening of a story typically provides the reader-hearer with a backdrop to the ensuing chain of events and plays an important role in the organizational structure and communicative function of the narrative because it orients the addressee toward what is to come by specifying the who, when, where, and why of the events to be recounted (Berman & Katzenberger, 2004, p.60). However, in expository texts generalizations are explicitly articulated in the opening and then elaborated by specific commentary in the form of ‘anecdotal or historical illustrations’, subcategorization, and so on. Thus, the opening element of each type of text, narrative and expository, imposes its own genre-specific demands that a text normally entails, accompanied with the shared requirements of text preplanning.

The fact that the opening of narrative texts are recognized as better and more "canonically constructed" than those of expository can reflect the difficulty of expository compared with narrative text construction in general. The reasons for this difference are complex. Graesser and Goodman (1983), (cited in Berman & Katzenberger (2004, p.63), mention that one reason for this difference is that narrative and expository texts differ in communicative purposes. The aim of narrative texts is to involve their readers in human experiences of story teller. Expository texts in contrast aim to provide information or to present ideas and so are often confined to more distanced or academic settings. So it is reasonable to conclude why the expository text group in this study used global reading strategies more than the narrative group (Table 3). It is the openings of the expository texts which involve generalizations explicitly articulated and then elaborated by specific commentary that makes students preplan the text construction, preview the text to see what it is about or slow down when encountering important information, the strategies which are considered as global reading strategies.

According to the results present in this study, it was demonstrated that not only expository group overrides narrative group in using global strategies but also in using support reading strategies. Strategies such as reading aloud which can help them understand what they read as the text becomes difficult, summarizing what is read in order to reflect on important information in the text, taking notes, paraphrasing or going back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas are all considered as support reading strategies. The reason for higher use of such strategies by expository group versus narrative group can be justified based on greater conceptual density and less familiar concepts in expository texts which affect cognitive processing so that readers have to return to an ambiguous and inconsistent sentence or passage several times, comparing what they know with what is written in the expository texts (Laura & Lynn, 2002, p. 4). However, narrative texts do not put such heavy demands on the reader.

The third category of metacognitive reading strategy is the problem-solving strategies which are repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information (Singhal, 2001). So it seems quite plausible that expository group in this study use problem-solving strategies more often that the narrative group (Table 5). Because of the variability within and across expository texts (text structure), greater conceptual density, having highly technical, multisyllabic words, it can be expected that problems develop more in expository than in narrative texts. As the text becomes more difficult, readers have to read slowly in order to ponder, adjust their reading speed, pay closer attention to what they read and reread to increase their understanding.

As regards gender effect, studies have established a great deal of evidence of gender differences in the use of language learning strategies. Some of the results have often favored
females as more frequent users of strategies (Oxford & Green, 1995). However, some of the studies have proved that males use language learning strategies more than females. Moreover, some studies have indicated no gender difference in language learning strategies. For instance, Rahimi (2004) in an investigation of the relationship between language learning strategy use and other variables such as gender and proficiency reported no gender difference between the EFL participants.

Because of the controversy over the gender differences in using language learning strategies, this study tried to control this factor by involving the same number of males and females in each group. The results showed no significant difference in the use of metacognitive reading strategies of both expository and narrative groups.

With respect to the effect of proficiency on the use of learning metacognitive strategies, research indicates that readers use many strategies, but that a distinction exists between proficient readers and poor readers. As anticipated, the results of this study are consistent with the general tenor of studies concerning metacognitive reading strategies in which more proficient readers tend to use the most effective strategies that leads to a thorough processing of the text. Some researchers (e.g., Chang, 1990; O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985; Park, 1997; Si-Qing, 1990, to name but a few), have reported a positive relationship between language proficiency and strategy use.

Lastly, it is to see if motivation plays a great role in these strategies. One of the most insightful strategy-related models of language learning in this regard is that of MacIntyre (1994) who highlights the importance of affective factors and links the use of a given language learning strategy with task demands, proficiency, aptitude, situation, attitude, motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, previous success, sanctions against strategy use, goals, and criteria for success. The findings of the present research showed that the more motivated the learners, the more they reported to strategy use. These findings support the findings of the previous studies (e.g., Change & Huang, 1999; MacIntyre & Noels; 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Wharton, 2000).

Conclusion

Text type, as the first and most important factor, proved to be a strong factor affecting metacognitive reading strategy by the Iranian EFL learners. In fact, the students who were given expository texts used metacognitive reading strategies to a high extent compared with the students who were given narrative texts. Gender as another variable did not show significant difference in using the metacognitive reading strategies while proficiency level was an important indicator affecting metacognitive reading strategy use by the Iranian EFL learners. The results showed that the students with a low proficiency level reported to use the overall strategies less frequently than the high proficiency level students. The level of motivation was the other factor affecting the use of metacognitive reading strategies. The findings of the study showed that the higher the level of motivation, the more frequently the students reported to use the whole MARSI.

This study revealed that our EFL participants were overall medium metacognitive strategy users with a total mean of 3.46 in the expository group and 3.01 in the narrative group on using MARSI. With respect to strategy categories, problem-solving strategies were as the most and support reading strategies as the least frequently used strategies by Iranian EFL learners.

With respect to individual strategies, strategy 8 (I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I’m reading) in the first group (expository) and strategy 30 (I try to guess
the meaning of unknown words or phrases) in the second group (narrative one) were the highest frequently used strategies with significant difference with a large number of other strategies. On the other hand, strategy 6 (I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text) in the expository group and strategy 18 (I stop from time to time and think about what I’m reading) in the narrative group were the least frequently used strategies with significant difference with a large number of other strategies.

Findings of the present study suggest that compared to narrative reading, the area of greater need is expository reading, because according to Lapp, Flood and Farnan (1989) in the early grades, narrative text is the most common text type on which instruction occurs. As children progress through the primary grades, they increasingly encounter expository text. By fourth grade, most students are expected to read expository material to derive content information. By high school, they spend the majority of their instructional time reading expository text (Barton, 1997; Hudson, Lignugaris-Kraft, & Miller, 1993).

Furthermore, EFL teachers must internalize the idea that the strategies that the language learners apply are influenced by some important variables including text type, proficiency level and motivation. By recognizing the tendency of different variables to influence strategy use, teachers can provide efficient and individual strategy training to specific types of learners based on theoretical and empirical suggestions provided by the current study.

References


About the authors

Hossein Shokouhi received his Ph.D. from La Trobe University, Australia. He has taught courses in Ph.D. program and has examined doctoral dissertations in Iran and overseas, has presented papers at conferences worldwide and has published over 30 articles in various local and international journal (e.g., Lingua, Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics, The Journal of Teaching Language Skills, Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics, a chapter in a book edited by Simon Botley and Anthony McEnery published by John Benjamins, as well as a book on discourse analysis and another on psycho-neurolinguistic concepts). He was hosted in 2005 as a visiting scholar by Potsdam University, Germany, and in 2010 by Deusto University, Spain, and is currently researching at La Trobe University and lecturing and supervising Ph.D. theses at Deakin University, Australia, while maintaining his position as an Associate Professor at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. His research interests are discourse analysis, cognitive understanding of language and second language acquisition. His current research: motion verbs cross-linguistically, intonation units of EFL learners, euphemistic expressions in newspapers, and pragmatics of discourse markers.

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